

# The Mystery of Edwin Drood

By Charles Dickens

## CHAPTER I.

### THE DAWN.

An ancient English cathedral tower? How can the ancient English cathedral tower be here? The well-known massive grey square tower of its kind? How can that be here? There is no spike of rusty iron in the air between the eye and it, from any point of the real prospect. What is the spike that intervenes, and who has set it up? Maybe it is set up by the Sultan's orders for the impaling of a horde of Turkish robbers, one by one. It is so, for cymbals clash and the Sultan goes by to his palace in long procession. Ten thousand scimitars flash in the sunlight, and three ten thousand shining white streamers. Then, follow white elephants carpeted in countless gorgeous colors, and in infinite number and attendance. Still the cathedral tower rises in the background, where it cannot be, and still no writing faces to be on the rusty spike. Stay! Is the spike so low a thing as the rusty spike on the top of a post of an old boat that has tumbled all awry? Some vague period of drowsy laughter must be devoted to the consideration of this possibility.

Shaking from head to foot, the man whose scattered consciousness has thus fantastically placed itself together at length rises, supports his trembling frame upon his arms and looks around. He is in the meadow and close of small rooms. Through the ragged window curtain the light of early day steals in from a miserable cot. He lies, dressed, across a large unmade bed, upon a bolster that has indeed given away under the weight upon it. Lying, also dressed and also across the bed, not long away, are a Chinaman, a Lascar and a baggard woman. The two first are in a sleep or stupor; the last is blowing at a kind of pipe, to kindle it. And as she blows, and shading it with her lean hand, concentrates its red spark of light, it serves in the dim morning as a lamp to show him what he sees of her.

"Another!" says this woman in a querulous, rattling whisper. "Have another!"

He looks about him with his hand to his forehead.

"You've smoked as many as five since you came in at midnight," the woman goes on, as she shrilly blows the pipe. "You've smoked as many as five since you came in at midnight, my head is so bad. Then two come in after you. Ah, poor me, the business is slack. Few Chinamen about the docks, and fewer Lascars, and no ships coming in, these days! Here's a ready for you, dear, you'll smoke like a good fellow, won't you, that the market price is drethle high just now? More nor three shillings and sixpence for a thimbleful! And you'll remember that nobody but me (and Jack Chinaman) can make the pipe smoke like this. You'll see as well as me! Has the true secret of mixing it? You'll pay up according, dear, won't you?"

She blows at the pipe as she speaks, and occasionally bubbling at it, inhales much of its contents.

"Oh me, oh me, my lungs is weak, my lungs is bad! It's nearly ready for you, dear, Ah, poor me, poor me, my poor hand shakes like to drop off! I see you coming to, and I see to my poor self, I'll have another ready for you, and he'll hear in mind the market price of opium, and pay according! Oh, my poor head! I makes my pipe of old penny oil bottles, ye see, dear—this is one—and it fits in a mouthpiece this way, and I takes my matter out of the bottle with this little silver horn pipe, and so I fills, dear, Ah, my poor nerves! I got heavens-hard drunk for sixteen year I forgot to take; but this don't hurt me, not to speak of. And it takes away the hunger as well as wittles, dear!"

She hands him the nearly empty pipe and sinks back, turning over on her face.

He rises unsteadily from the bed, lays the pipe upon the hearthstone, draws back the ragged curtain and looks into the street. The street is empty. He notices that the woman has begun smoking herself into a strange likeness of the Chinaman. His form of cheek, eye and temple and his nose are repeated in her. Said Chinaman, convulsively writhing with one of his many gods or devils, perhaps, and snarls horribly. The Lascar laughs and dribbles at the mouth. The hostess is still.

"What visions can she have?" the waking man muses, as he turns her face towards him, and stands looking down at it. "Visions of many butchers' shops and public houses and much credit? Of an increase of idle customers, and this horrible bedstead set upright again, and his horrible court sweet clean? What can she rise to, under any quantity of opium, higher than that—Eh?"

He bends down his ear, to listen to her mutterings.

"Unintelligible!"

As he watches the spasmodic shoots and darts that break out of her face and limbs, like fitful lightning out of a dark sky, some contagion in them seizes upon him, insomuch that he has to withdraw himself to a lean armchair by the hearth—placed there, perhaps, for such emergencies—and to sit in it, holding tight until he has got the better of this unpleasant spirit of imitation.

Then he comes back, pounces on the Chinaman, and, seizing him with both hands by the throat, turns him violently on the bed. The Chinaman clutches the aggressive hand, resists, gasps and protests.

"What do you say?"

"Unintelligible!"

Slowly loosening his grasp as he listens to the incoherent jargon with an attentive frown, he turns to the Lascar and fairly drags him forth upon the floor. As he falls the Lascar starts into a half-risen attitude, glares with his eyes, lashes about him fiercely with his arms and draws a phantom knife. It then becomes apparent that the Lascar has taken possession of this knife for safety's sake; for, she, too starting up and restraining and expostulating with him, the knife is visible in her dress, in his, when they drawily drop back, side by side.

There has been chattering and clattering enough between them, but to no purpose. When any distinct word has been flung into the air it has had no sense or sequence. Wherefore "unintelligible!" is again the comment of the watcher, made with some reassured nodding of his head, and a gloomy smile. He then lays certain silver money on the table, finds his hat, gropes his way down the broken stairs, gives a good morning to some rat-ridden doorkeeper, in bed in a black booth beneath the stairs, and passes out.

That same afternoon the massive grey square tower of an old cathedral rises before the sight of a jaded traveler. The bells are going for daily vesper service, and he may needs notice, as one would say, from his name to reach the open air of the cathedral. The choir are getting on their suited white robes in a hurry when he arrives among them, gets on his own robe and falls into the procession filing into service. Then the sacristan locks the iron-barred gates that divide the sanctuary from the chancel, and all of the procession having scuttled into their places, hides their faces, and then the intoned words, "When the wicked man—" rise among groins of arches and beams of roof, awakening muffled thunder.

## CHAPTER II.

### A DEAN, AND A CHAPTER ALSO.

Whoever has observed that sedate and clerical Mrs. Dean, who perhaps have noticed that when he wings his way homeward towards nightfall, in a sedate and clerical company, two rocks will suddenly detach themselves from the rest, will retire their flight for some distance, and then these two rocks will separate and utter to mere vulgar service, and he may needs notice, as one would say, from his name to reach the open air of the cathedral. The choir are getting on their suited white robes in a hurry when he arrives among them, gets on his own robe and falls into the procession filing into service. Then the sacristan locks the iron-barred gates that divide the sanctuary from the chancel, and all of the procession having scuttled into their places, hides their faces, and then the intoned words, "When the wicked man—" rise among groins of arches and beams of roof, awakening muffled thunder.

Not only is the day waning, but the year. The low sun is fiery and yet cold behind the monastic ruin, and the Virginia creeper on the cathedral wall has shrouded half its deep-red leaves down on the pavement. There has been rain this afternoon, and a wintry shoulder goes among the little pools on the cracked uneven flagstones, and through the giant elm trees as they shed a gust of tears. Their fallen leaves lie strewn thickly about. Some of these leaves, in a timid rush, seek sanctuary within the low arched cathedral door, but two men coming out

than their nephews. By George, I wish it was the case with us!"

"Why?"

"Because if it was I'd take the lead with you, Jack, and be as wise as Bogue, dull Carol that turned a young man ere, and Bogue, dull Carol that turned an old man to clay. Hullo, Jack! Don't drink!"

"Why not?"

"Asks why not, on Puss's birthday, and no happy returns proper to Puss, Jack, and many of us. Happy returns, I mean."

Laying an affectionate and laughing touch on the boy's extended hand, as if it were at once his giddy head and his light heart, Mr. Jasper drinks the toast in silence.

"Hip, hip, hip, and nine times nine and one to drink with, and all that, understood. Hooray, hooray!—And now, Jack, let's have a little talk about Puss. Two pairs of nut-crackers! Pass me one and take the other. Crack!"

"How's Puss getting on, Jack?"

"What a dreadfully conscientious fellow you are, Jack! But I know, Lord bless you! Inattentive! She can learn anything, if she will."

"My friends know heart cure cured me."

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Heart Trouble,  
Nervous Prostration  
and Dyspepsia.

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# WHO MURDERED EDWIN DROOD?

## THE JOURNAL

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